

Message Text

SECRET

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 5200

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT LE PINS
SUBJ: LEBANON: LIFE WITH BACHIR GEMAYEL

1. HENRI SFEIR, A YOUNG MARONITE BANKER AND WOULD-BE POLITICIAN FROM THE VILLAGE OF RAYFOUN IN KESROUAN, CAME TO SEE ME SEPTEMBER 6 TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIM AUGUST 13. I HAD HEARD THAT BACHIR GEMAYEL'S MEN HAD LOOTED HIS HOUSE OF SEVERAL MILLION LEBANESE POUNDS WORTH OF PROPERTY BUT DID NOT KNOW DETAILS.

2. SFEIR HAS FOR SOMETIME BEEN OUTSPOKEN IN HIS OPPOSITION TO BOTH BACHIR GEMAYEL AND THE CHAMOUNS. AT ONE TIME HE HAD HIS OWN MILITIA AND WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MINOR WAR LORDS OF KESROUAN, BUT HAD DISBANDED HIS MILITIA SOME TIME AGO. ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 12 BACHIR GEMAYEL'S MEN HAD SEIZED FOUR OF HIS SUPPORTERS. SFEIR HAD NOT KNOWN THE REASON AND HAD BEEN IN PROCESS OF TRYING TO SECURE THEIR RELEASE WHEN THE ARCHBISHOP OF KESROUAN HAD CALLED TO SAY THE MEN WOULD BE RETURNED AND THAT HE WANTED SFEIR TO ATTEND MASS THAT MORNING TO SHOW HE WAS NOT MAD AT ANY ONE. SFEIR

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WAS DRESSING TO GO TO CHURCH WHEN SUDDENLY KATAIB MILITIA, WHOM HE ESTIMATED AT 300 MEN (WE WOULD SUGGEST THIS BE DIVIDED BY 10), OPENED FIRE ON HIS HOUSE. HE AND HIS TWO SUPPORTERS INSIDE HAD ONLY SIX M16 RIFLES AND 200 ROUNDS OF AMMUNITION. THEY HELD OFF THE KATAIB FOR FOUR HOURS DURING WHICH HE CALLED THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE SEVERAL TIMES AND TALKED TO BOTH SARKIS AND GENERAL KHOURY. LATTER PROMISED HIM HE WOULD SEND ARMY FORCE TO SCENE

IMMEDIATELY TO STOP THE FIGHTING. THIS WAS AFTER THE FIRST HOUR AND A HALF OF SHOOTING. TWO HOURS LATER HE CALLED KHOURY TO ASK WHERE THE ARMY WAS AND KHOURY HAD GIVEN HIM A DUSTY ANSWER. HE THEN CALLED THE POLICE HEADQUARTERS IN THE VILLAGE AND LEARNED THAT A UNIT FROM SARBA BARRACKS HAD ARRIVED UNDER COMMAND OF A CAPTAIN AZIZ. (KHOURY HAD SAID THE UNIT WOULD CONSIST OF 100 MEN AND TWO TANKS.) AZIZ TOLD SFEIR, HOWEVER, THAT HE COULD NOT INTERVENE. SFEIR LATER LEARNED THAT AZIZ WAS HELPING BACHIR TO BESIEGE HIS HOUSE.

3. SFEIR THEN CALLED THE ARCHBISHOP, WHO IN TURN URGED HIM TO LEAVE THE HOUSE AND ESCAPE WHILE HE COULD. SFEIR HAD GONE TO THE CHURCH TO SEEK REFUGE AND THE ARCHBISHOP TOLD HIM TO LEAVE BECAUSE HE COULD NOT PROTECT HIM. MEANWHILE, KHOURY HAD PROMISED TO SEND A HELICOPTER TO SAVE HIM, BUT IT NEVER ARRIVED. SFEIR EVENTUALLY ESCAPED IN A PRIVATE CAR AND REACHED THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AT BAABDA. HE SPENT THE NIGHT THERE AND WAS TAKEN AWAY THE NEXT DAY BY PRESIDENT FRANJIYAH IN THE LATTER'S HELICOPTER. (SFEIR IS MARRIED TO A WOMAN FROM ZGHORTA.)

4. SFEIR ESTIMATED THE MONEY AND POSSESSIONS STOLEN FROM HIS HOUSE BY GEMAYEL'S MEN AT 10 MILLION LEBANESE POUNDS. I SUSPECT THAT FIGURE IS TOO HIGH, BUT HIS LOSSES ARE PROBABLY CONSIDERABLE. SFEIR IS NOW LIVING PART TIME IN EHDEN WITH HIS WIFE'S FAMILY AND PART-TIME IN WEST BEIRUT. HE DOES NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE FUTURE.

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5. ABOVE IS A SUMMARY OF A RATHER DRAMATIC PRESENTATION WHICH ILLUSTRATES THE HARDLINE TACTICS OF THE GEMAYELS AND THE KATAIB WHICH HAVE MADE THEM UNPOPULAR WITH A GREAT MANY CHRISTIAN LEBANESE. THEIR OUTLOOK IS ESSENTIALLY TOTALITARIAN AND THE NAME PHALANGES IS VERY APT. PARKER

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NNN

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